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TAGS: [CVIS](#) [CMGT](#) [EUN](#)
SUBJECT: STATUS OF SCHENGEN INFORMATION SYSTEM II
AND VISA INFORMATION SYSTEM

SUMMARY

1. (SBU) Delays to the upgrading of the current Schengen Information System (SIS), the EU's primary system for cross-border sharing of lookout information, may result in the project being scrapped entirely. Numerous technical and political obstacles have delayed the project since 2003 when the EU passed legislation to update the information database. The current SIS, established in 1995, collects police and judicial data, such as information on thefts and missing people, from across several European states (including some outside the EU and Schengen) and is used as the primary database for border and visa checks. The so-called "SIS II" would allow for the inclusion of biometric data, such as fingerprints and photographs. The plan has been stalled several times and was expected to be implemented in September 2009, which now seems unlikely, drawing calls from some member states to drop the project. END SUMMARY

IMPETUS FOR UPGRADE

2. (U) The primary motivation for developing SIS II is the inclusion of biometric data in the criminal information shared among member states. This biometric data would be used to assist in the identification of visa applicants and those travelling across the EU's borders. In addition to the biometric data, the new application of SIS would allow for member states to exchange alerts (with the equivalent legal authority as arrest warrants) and strengthen data protection standards. Further, the proposed changes were expected to enhance the system's capacity for further integration of new member states. Meanwhile, the new Schengen members (Poland, Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia, Slovenia, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Malta, and Switzerland) have joined a SIS 1+ (aka SISone4all) application-an enlarged capacity version of SIS.

FATE OF SIS II UNCLEAR

3. (SBU) One significant delay included a legal challenge by an unsuccessful bidder for the contract to develop the system. Although the case did not reverse the successful bid, the legal proceeding slowed the project. Member states also could not agree on the location of the central system. Thus, political, not just technical, issues have prevented a quick implementation of SIS II.

4. (SBU) Some EU leaders, especially interior minister Maria Fekter of Austria, reportedly consider that the European Commission has mismanaged the project. The Council adopted resolutions February 26 that the September 2009 target date was unrealistic and mandated a feasibility study to be conducted on the future of the program. The European Commission has already paid 28 of the 68 million budgeted for the project, which still may be scrapped. While the Commission, especially Commissioner for Freedom, Justice, and Security Jacques Barrot, acknowledged problems in the project in its presentation to the Schengen Mixed Committee on February 26, it still believes the project is viable, without having to start from scratch. By May 2009, the Commission must submit a report on the findings from the feasibility study to the Council as well as assessments of alternative plans, such as upgrading SIS 1+.

5. (U) At the 26 February 2009 Justice and Home Affairs Council,

ministers agreed that the fate of the project would be decided in June 2009 after the Commission's report. At that time, the ministers will decide whether to push forward with the project at full strength, implement only those aspects of SIS II that are operational at the time, or drop the project entirely.

¶6. (U) The Commission in March will announce a new management plan for the EU JHA databases, including SIS and Visa Information System (VIS). At this time, it is unclear whether the decision will be for a single entity to administer both SIS and VIS or whether separate entities will oversee the databases. The former would streamline data sharing with the possibility that SIS II system would be modeled or merged with the VIS. The VIS was created in 2007 to promote the common asylum policy by allowing border management officials to share information on visa applications to the EU among member states and to standardize the case management and processing of visa applications. The VIS will contain biometric data, such as fingerprints and photographs, as well as other information on visa applicants. The VIS will be rolled out slowly, by the end of 2009. If the decision is the latter, Europol may manage SIS and Frontex VIS.

COMMENT

¶7. (SBU) Whether the U.S. will have any access, now or in the future, to information in SIS I, SIS 1+, or SIS II remains unclear. Whichever direction the projects takes, the U.S. will press for greater access to the information in cooperation on judicial matters.

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